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Buildable Lands Program: 2002 Evaluation Report – A Summary of Findings

June 2003



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Buildable Lands Program: 2002 Evaluation Report A Summary of Findings

Prepared by

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With the participation of the Buildable Lands Advisory Committee, including: Staff from King, Pierce, Snohomish, Kitsap, and Clark counties and their associated cities and the Thurston Regional Planning Council.

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Executive Summary

The Buildable Lands Program was adopted as an amendment to the GMA in 1997. It is a review and evaluation program aimed at determining if six Western Washington counties have an adequate amount of residential, commercial, and industrial land to meet the growth needs spelled out in their GMA comprehensive plans. If the buildable lands analysis indicates land supplies are not adequate, local governments are to determine how to remedy the matter without changing urban growth boundaries. Methods such as zoning changes, permit streamlining, and development incentives are to be used.

The first reports under the state's Buildable Lands Program are now available. Prepared by Clark, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish, and Thurston counties, the reports address whether urban growth areas (UGAs) for the counties contain adequate development capacity to accommodate the state population forecast as well as projected employment growth for their area. Residential, commercial, and industrial land uses are analyzed.

This report, *Buildable Lands Program: 2002 Evaluation Report*, is a summary of the findings from the reports submitted by the six buildable lands counties.

All county reports indicate that their overall UGAs have adequate capacity to meet growth demands as indicated in their adopted comprehensive plans. However, there are a few individual cities that may not have adequate land supply for either residential and/or non-residential use.

The counties also addressed urban densities in their reports. Greater densities mean less sprawl and reduced cost of public services.

The average achieved residential dwelling units per acre in the UGAs as indicated in the counties' reports are: Clark 6, King 7.3, Pierce 4.02, and Thurston 3.59. Using a slightly different methodology, which may result in higher estimates, Kitsap reported 3.87 and Snohomish 8.89 dwelling units per acre. Two specific examples are given in the report showing how residential development is changing. In Pierce County, residential densities have increased from under 2 to more than 4 dwelling units per acre from 1995-2000, and a trend towards even higher densities appears to be occurring as the county's Growth Management Act (GMA) policies take effect. An analysis of density trends in King County shows a significant movement toward greater density in residential land is taking place.

Jurisdictions with a large inventory of lots created before GMA plans began to be carried out may have a lower achieved density until that inventory is replaced over time with subdivisions that meet the counties' requirements under their GMA plans.

The Buildable Lands Program generated considerable interest at the local level. Many counties established advisory committees, including technical advisory groups, to assist them in the process. Citizens groups, organizations representing builders and realtors, and others reviewed draft reports and offered comments.

The deadline for the first evaluation report prepared by counties under the program was September 1, 2002. Further reports are required every five years.

The state provided \$2 million in grants to local governments for buildable lands work for the 1997-1999 biennium and \$2.5 million for the 2000-2002 biennium. All state buildable lands funding was eliminated as of June 30, 2002, but the buildable lands requirements for the six counties remain.

Intent and Scope of the Buildable Lands Program

The Growth Management Act (GMA) was enacted in 1990, requiring a deadline of 1994 for the adoption of local comprehensive plans by those counties meeting the initial GMA threshold requirements.

Once the plans were in place, questions arose as to whether the urban growth areas (UGAs) established through the comprehensive planning process were adequately sized to accommodate the forecasted population. The basic "bottom up" nature of GMA plan development may have caused these questions to occur. This allows each plan to be based on the best available information and locally derived assumptions. Much of the debate has focused on determining whether or not there were errors in the assumptions used by local governments and the sizing of their UGAs. The buildable lands requirement (RCW 36.70A.215) is a 1997 amendment to the GMA aimed at improving confidence and coordination in the analysis of UGAs.

Often referred to as the Buildable Lands Program, the new legislation created a requirement for a review and evaluation program to be implemented over the next five years. The new statute requires a more detailed analysis of the UGA's capacity for the six most populated Western Washington counties: Clark, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish, and Thurston, and the 102 cities within them.



The first evaluation reports were due on September 1, 2002. All six counties have completed the basic reporting on time, despite elimination of the state Buildable Lands Program grants as of June 30, 2002. [Snohomish County completed all grants contract obligations with the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED) on schedule, and completed its final report in January 2003 after submitting a preliminary report before the September 1, 2002 deadline.]

The program requires an ongoing effort of monitoring policy outcomes and an evaluation report every five years. CTED is also required to provide a report to the Washington State Legislature in 2007 on the effectiveness of the program.

Although most of the data has been collected at the parcel level, the county reports are based on the aggregation of these data to larger geographic areas. The reports are not intended to be an inventory of marketable land, but viewed as a general indication of state and local policy effectiveness in achieving urban land use patterns.

Context Within GMA

The Buildable Lands Program is part of the GMA and serves a distinct function in the coming ten-year update of UGAs in the local comprehensive plans. As much of the GMA updating process is forward-looking, such as allocation of new Office of Financial Management (OFM) population targets to cities and towns, the program offers an opportunity to look back on the effects of currently adopted plans.

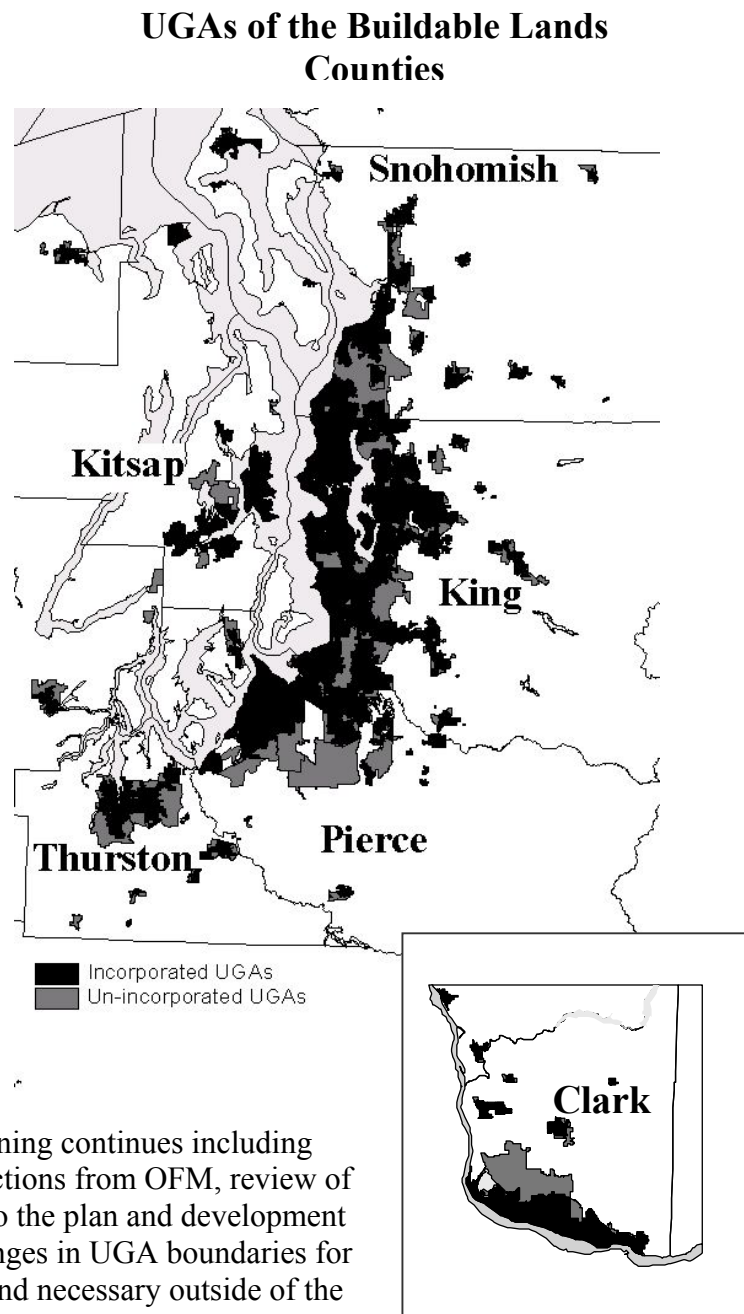
The Buildable Lands Program's intent is to review the adopted GMA plan's progress in accommodating OFM population forecasts. RCW 36.70A.215(3)(a)

Target densities from the plan are compared to the actual densities calculated from the buildable lands data collection program. RCW 36.70A.215(3)(b), (c)

New measures are then implemented to reduce the inconsistencies between the plan and actual development. Annual monitoring of policy outcomes is required, with evaluation reports due every five years. RCW 36.70A.215(2)

Concurrent with the Buildable Lands Program, overall GMA planning continues including allocation of new population projections from OFM, review of UGAs, and periodic amendments to the plan and development regulations. This may include changes in UGA boundaries for minor additions or adjustments found necessary outside of the Buildable Lands Program. All of these GMA activities are better informed by the program, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of the local comprehensive plan.

The results of the Buildable Lands Program should assist all jurisdictions by demonstrating the effectiveness of various policies in achieving GMA planning goals.



Process for Developing the Local Buildable Lands Program

The Buildable Lands Program requires counties and their jurisdictions to take specific steps in developing a review and evaluation program. The *Buildable Lands Program Guidelines* were published by CTED to address certain issues, such as common definitions and methodologies. Developed in collaboration with the counties and cities, the guidebook has been useful in bringing together the individual reports for a general level of reporting. The following is an overview of the steps needed to comply with the act.

Adopt County-Wide Planning Policies: The county-wide planning policies are amended to establish a review and evaluation program consistent with the buildable lands legislation. Methods to resolve disputes between jurisdictions are to be included.

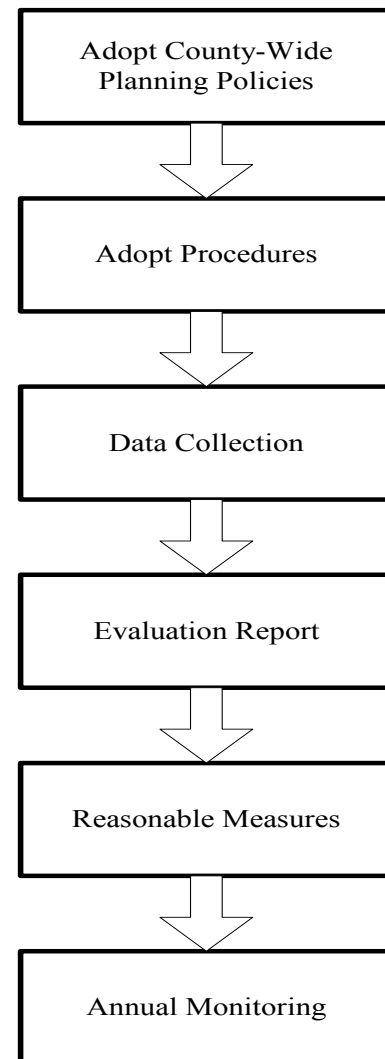
Adopt Procedures: The actual process for data collection and evaluation are agreed upon by the local jurisdictions within a county to ensure consistent results at the county level.

Collect Data: Local governments establish trends in land consumption by tracking five years of development permit information for residential, commercial, and industrial development.

Prepare Evaluation Report: Actual development density and intensity is compared with the comprehensive plan. This evaluation is to be completed by each of the six counties and their cities no later than September 1, 2002. Inconsistencies between actual development and comprehensive plan policies are to be identified.

Develop Reasonable Measures: Policy changes are developed that are “reasonable measures” to bring actual development trends in line with policy expectations. This does not include changes in the UGA boundaries, but includes such activities as density bonuses, mixed-use zoning, and compact development patterns.

Develop Annual Monitoring Program: Local governments monitor annually the effects of the adoption and implementation of the reasonable measures. Local governments make any necessary adjustments to data collection methods for the next phase and continue the review and evaluation cycle. CTED is required to report to the Washington State Legislature by December 31, 2007, on the effectiveness of the Buildable Lands Program.



Evaluation Reports: County-Wide Results

CTED collaborated with the six buildable lands counties to produce a guidebook, which described the general approach to complying with the act. The following is paraphrased from the *King County Buildable Lands Report* outlining the general analysis methodology used by the counties.

The basic methodology to produce the reports depends on the collection of actual development data over a five-year period, typically the 1995 to 2000 timeframe. The data describe growth trends since the adoption of GMA. Included are the amount, type, location, and the density of residential, commercial, and industrial projects.

A parcel level land supply inventory was also conducted to provide an estimate of potentially developable vacant and redevelopable acreage within the UGA. The supply analysis addressed the need to deduct where appropriate land encumbered by critical areas, future land needs for public infrastructure, and a proportion of land assumed to be unavailable during the planning period.

The capacity of the UGA and the development potential of land supplies were estimated using data from the first two elements. Densities achieved during the review provided the basis for assumptions about future residential and employment yields on developable land.

The final step of the evaluation report compares the residential and job growth targets for the remaining portion of the 20-year planning period with the capacity for housing units and jobs.

Adequacy of Total UGA

One of the main purposes of the Buildable Lands Program is to determine if counties currently have sufficient land in the UGAs to meet the demands of the adopted plans.

Table 1. County-Wide UGA Adequacy

All counties have reported that there is adequate capacity within their overall UGAs to accommodate the anticipated growth for the remainder of the planning period. Even though a county may report having an overall adequate land supply, there may be individual cities that may have a deficiency in either residential and/or non-residential land supply. These isolated areas can be identified in the individual county reports that may be obtained from counties directly. (See Appendix B.)

County Name	Statement of Adequacy	Planning Horizon
Clark	Yes ¹	2012
King	Yes	2012
Kitsap	Yes	2012
Pierce	Yes	2017
Snohomish	Yes	2012
Thurston	Yes	2025

Note 1: Clark County made this determination based on the future adoption of new density guidelines as described on page 28 of their report.

UGA Achieved Density

Although the question of the size of the UGA is of major concern, the underlying policy issue of achieved density is of even greater importance. Greater density is equated to less sprawl and reduced cost of public services.

Achieved density is the measure of the actual number of dwelling units, both single-family and multifamily units, constructed on a parcel of land. This is in contrast to planned density, which is based on allowed lot size and number of dwelling units in a particular land use zoning designation. Planned density may not be reached for a variety of reasons, such as new lots being created that are larger than the minimum prescribed for a zone.

Jurisdictions collected development data from both building permits and subdivision records for a period of five years, generally 1995 to 2000. The actual achieved density for development within each zone was calculated based on these records.

Figure 1 shows the overall achieved densities for each county, including both single-family and multifamily activities. The Buildable Lands Program does not require counties to report an overall achieved density, but the data must be presented for individual UGAs. It is anticipated that achieved densities will increase over time as pre-GMA vested developments are completed and GMA-compliant subdivisions come to represent the majority of new development.

Average Achieved Residential Density in UGAs by County²

Figure 1A. Achieved Density Based on Building Permit Information

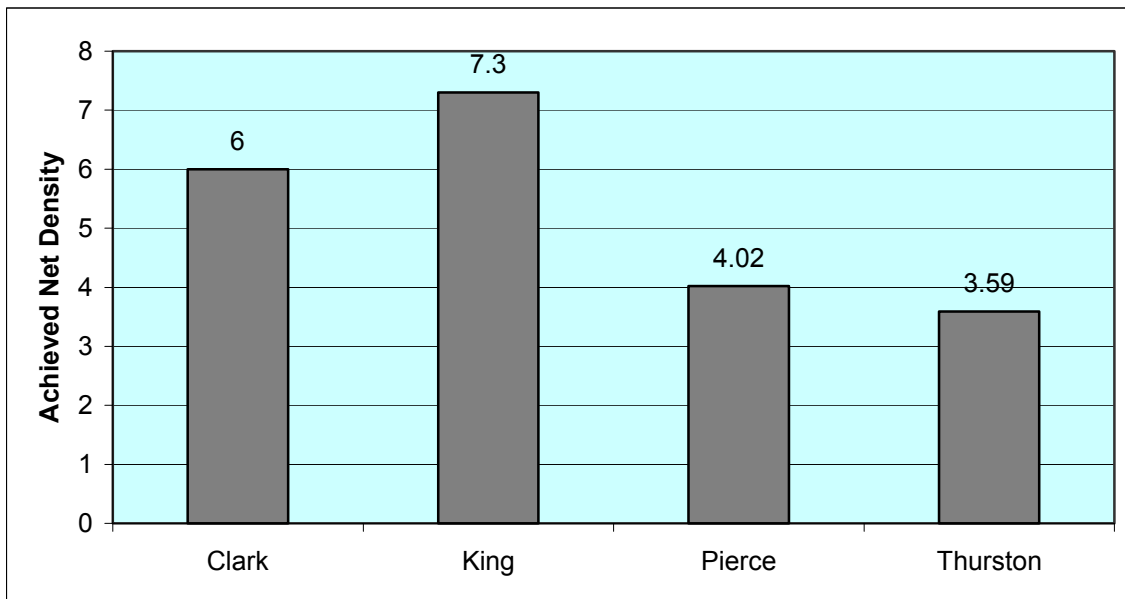
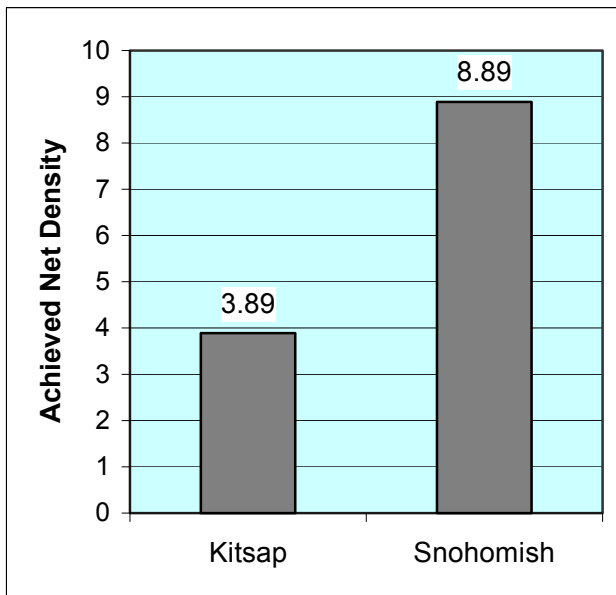


Figure 1B. Achieved Density Based on Building Permit and Subdivision Information



Note 2: Kitsap and Snohomish counties included new plats in their achieved densities based on assumption that the parcels are committed for immediate development. The remaining counties based their findings solely on single-family and multifamily building permit records. The densities in Figures 1A and 1B are not strictly comparable.

The achieved density is an average for all the UGAs in a county, showing a general pattern of development. Individual reports from each county should be consulted for more detailed information (see Appendix B).

UGA Residential Capacity

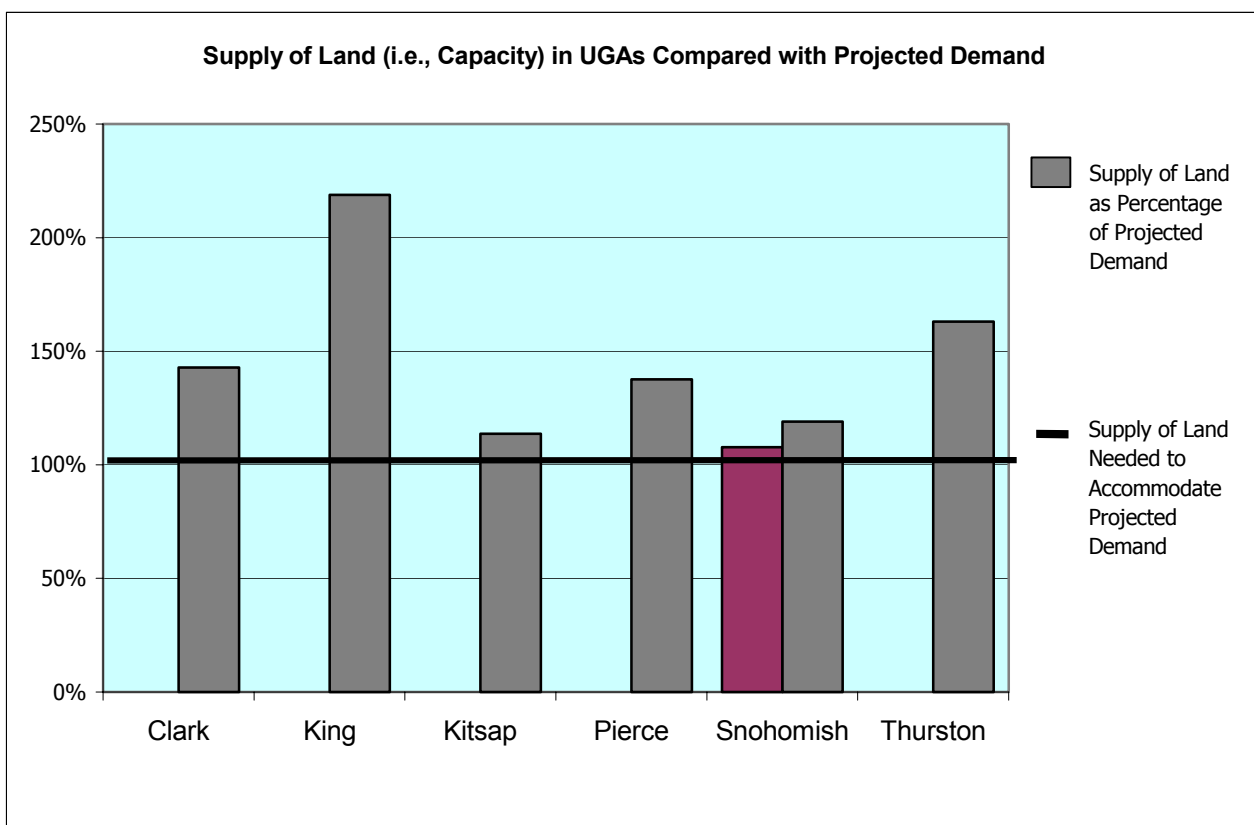
The Buildable Lands Program requires jurisdictions to determine if their current UGA is adequate to accommodate the population forecasted for the remaining years of their adopted plan. The five-year development history used to calculate achieved densities is used as a baseline to project future demand for land. The actual supply of land in the UGA was found by conducting an inventory at the parcel level of detail to find how much land was developable. This includes both vacant land and land thought to be under-developed (more units could be added) and redevelopable (demolition and reconstruction). The estimated amounts of buildable land were refined by deducting land for such uses as parks, other public uses, and environmentally sensitive areas. The specific approach taken by each county was dependent upon availability of data.

Within this general framework, methods used to calculate vacant and underutilized land varied by county. In some cases a uniform definition was adopted, while in others each community determined at what point new construction or infill development seemed likely to occur. Vacant parcels and parcels with buildings falling below a specific minimum value were added to the inventory as capable of supporting additional dwelling units based on the minimum lot size for the zone where they are located.

Future development capacity for the UGA combines the findings of the achieved density research and land supply inventory in order to estimate the potential for additional dwelling units and jobs that can be accommodated within each UGA. The potential number of dwelling units on developable acres was based on densities achieved during the five-year review period. This analysis was performed for each UGA within a county. Figure 2 is the average of the individual UGAs. As with all of the aggregated numbers in this report, deficiencies in one area may be masked by surplus capacities in others.

The capacity of 100 percent means that there is an exact match between the amount of land needed to meet the residential targets and the amount of land available within the current UGA. All counties reported sufficient capacity in their UGAs to accommodate the remaining population allocation of the adopted plan.

Figure 2. Future Residential Capacity³



Note 3: Snohomish County reported using two different scenarios. The right part of the bar shows scenario A's value (119.3%) and scenario B is shown as the left part of the bar (107.7%). Please refer to the county's report for details of the scenarios.

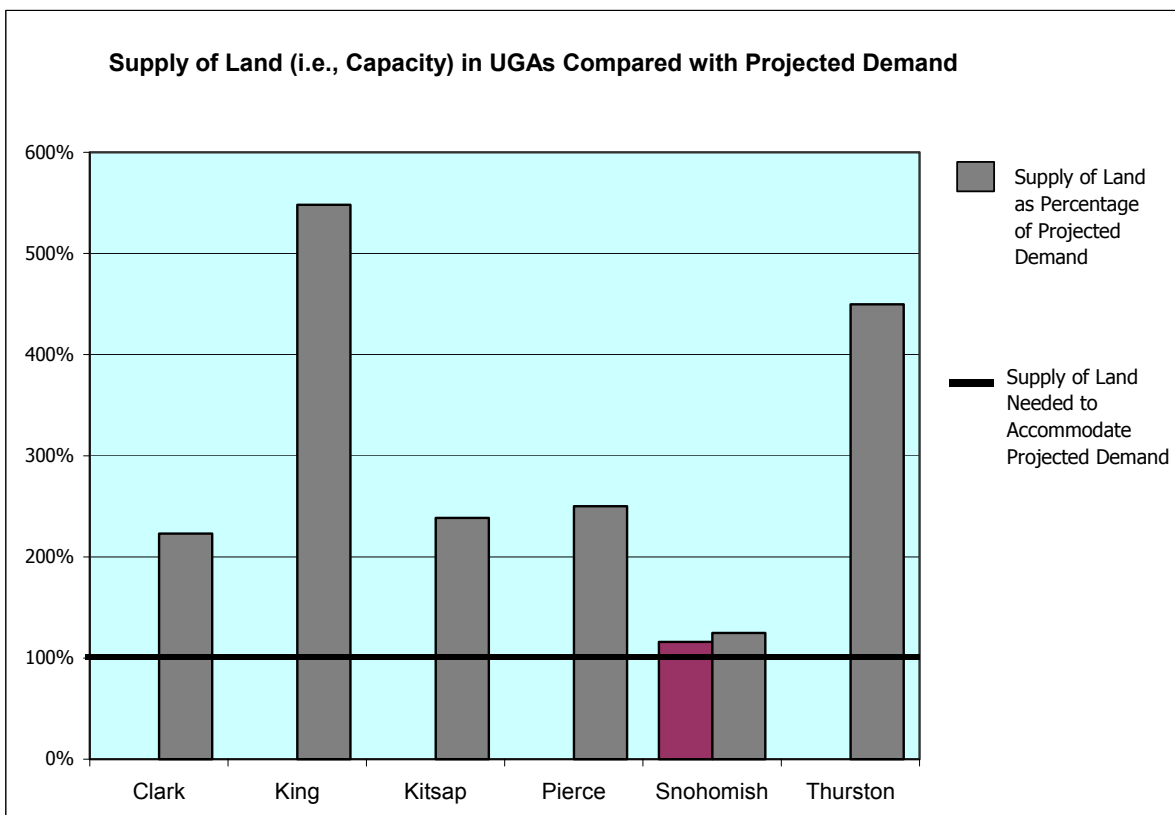
UGA Commercial and Industrial Capacity

The statute requires a similar analysis to be conducted for commercial and industrial land as for residential. The same land supply inventory is used to identify where development may occur, but development is measured more by intensity than density. The intensity of non-residential development is measured in terms of floor-area-ratio, calculated as the square feet of building divided by the square feet of the site.

Estimates for future commercial and industrial land demands are more difficult to calculate because of the lack of site specific employment data. The problem is further complicated by the fact that as businesses change, the same building could have a higher or lower number of employees based on the type of activities. All counties show adequate land supply for commercial and industrial uses.

The capacity of 100 percent means that there is an exact match between the amount of land needed to meet the commercial and industrial targets and the amount of land available within the current UGA designated for that type of land use.

Figure 3. Future Commercial/Industrial Capacity⁴



Note 4: Snohomish County reported using two different scenarios. The right part of the bar shows scenario A's value (125.0%) and scenario B is shown as the darker left part of the bar (115.7%). Please refer to the county's report for details of the scenarios.

Selected County Density Trends

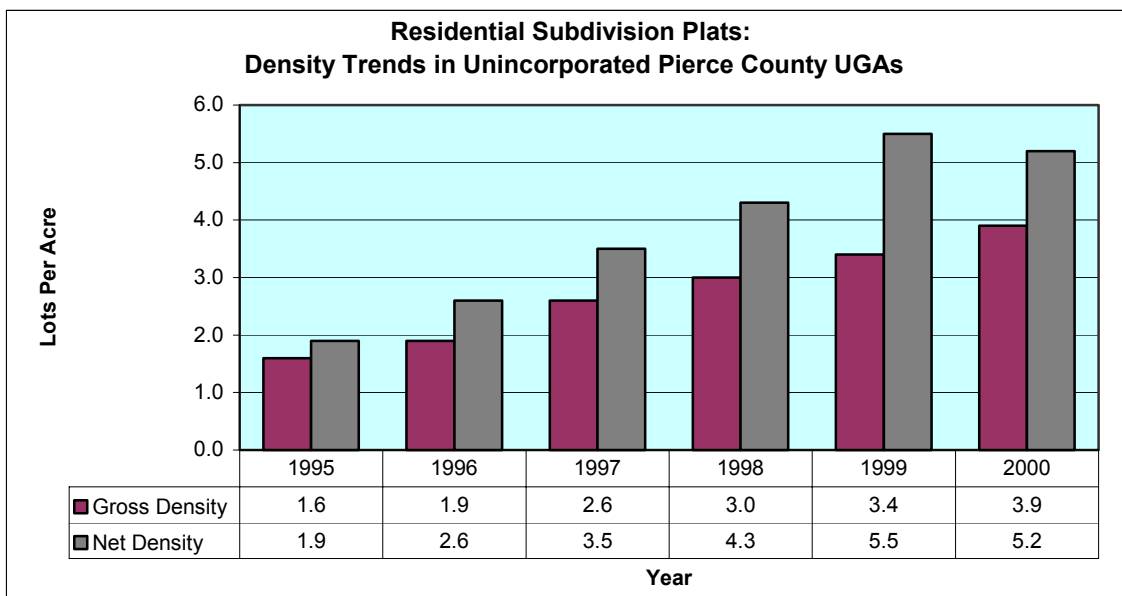
The Buildable Lands Program uses data from the first five years after the adoption of a GMA comprehensive plan to calculate the average achieved density over that period. The first Evaluation Report creates a benchmark to measure future reports and the progress being made in achieving the goals of comprehensive plans. By looking at the development data in yearly increments, it may be possible to discern emerging trends as comprehensive plan policies take effect.

Due to the fact that each county approached the collection of data in a way that was most effective based on their individual situation, not all have data broken out for each year of the inventory. Included are trends from Pierce and King counties.

Pierce County

Although not required by the GMA, the results from the buildable land data collection efforts can be used to show trends in density. Figure 4 illustrates that not only has Pierce County achieved an urban density of over 4 dwelling units/net acre, but also there appears to be a trend toward higher densities, as comprehensive plan policies take effect. Figure 4 shows the density increase in new residential subdivision plats.

Figure 4. Selected Data from Pierce County⁵



Note 5. Net density: Number of housing units divided by net acres available for residential development. It is determined by subtracting from the total land area any land determined as unbuildable due to environmental or other constraints, non-residential use (i.e., play areas), and land used for public rights of ways or other public facilities.

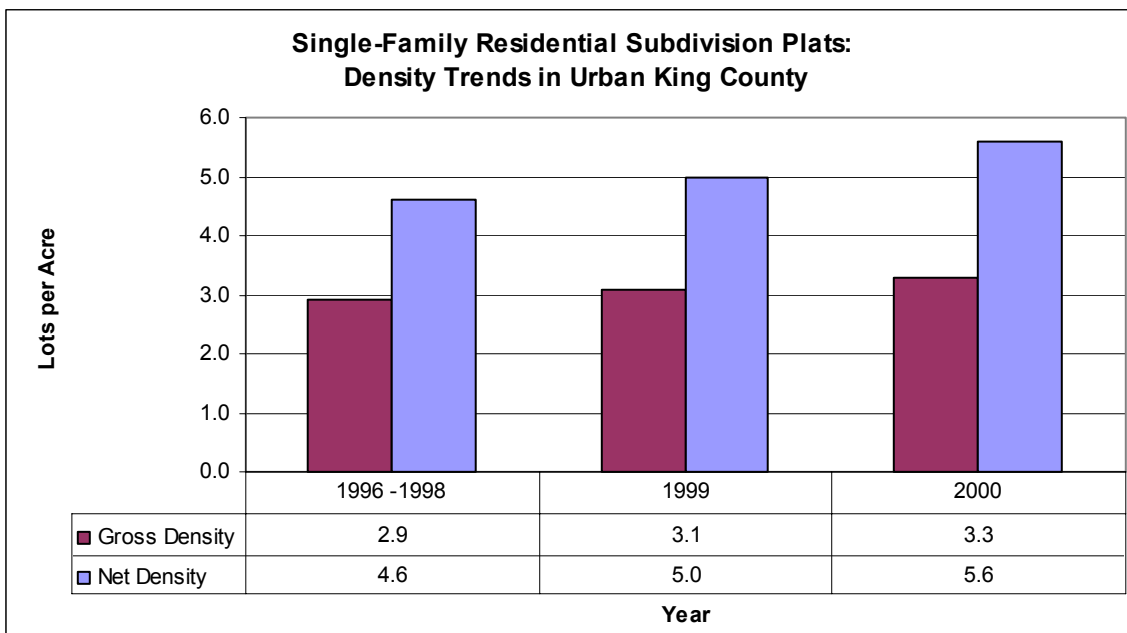
King County

Figure 5 utilizes data collected for the Buildable Lands Program in King County for the review period of 1996-2000. This trend analysis is not required by the GMA and was created for this report.

Please note that the graph represents all single-family residential subdivision activity that occurred in the county's designated urban areas with the exception of plats in the cities of Seattle and Sammamish. However, data on single-family building permits in Seattle and other cities confirm the UGA-wide trend represented by the three points in time.

Figure 5 shows the combined density trends in the cities and the unincorporated UGAs in the county. The trends indicate that King County and its cities have succeeded in encouraging more compact development on single-family residential land within the UGA boundary.

Figure 5. Selected Data from King County⁶



Note 6. Net density: Number of housing units divided by net acres available for residential development. It is determined by subtracting from the total land area any land determined as unbuildable due to environmental or other constraints, non-residential use (i.e., play areas), and land used for public rights of ways or other public facilities.

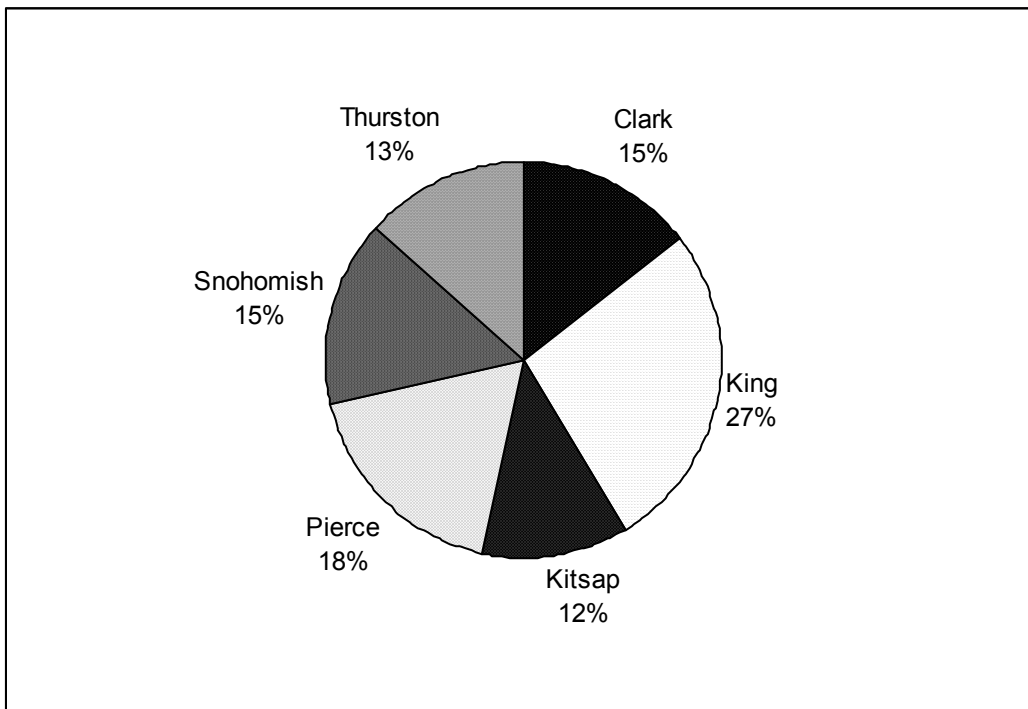
State Grant Funding

The state Legislature provided grants to the counties, cities, and a regional planning organization to conduct the Buildable Lands Program for their jurisdiction. The initial proviso was for a total of \$2 million for the 1997-1999 biennium. This was increased to \$2.5 million in the 1999-2001 biennium. All funding was eliminated in the second half of the 2002-2003 biennium.

Table 2. Total Program Budget

County Name	Base Population OFM 2000	Number of Cities as of 2000	Total Grants FY 1997 to 2002
Clark	345,238	8	\$ 790,134
King	1,737,034	38	\$1,461,027
Kitsap	231,969	4	\$ 648,744
Pierce	700,820	21	\$ 971,339
Snohomish	606,024	19	\$ 836,763
Thurston	207,355	7	\$ 725,269
TOTAL	3,828,440	97	\$5,433,776

Figure 6. Distribution of State Grants Over the Five-Year Life of the Program Funding



Estimated Expenditures

Figure 7 shows estimated categories of expenditures by local governments for the Buildable Lands Program 1997-2002. State funding for the program was eliminated at the end of the fiscal year for June 30, 2002. The chart shows relative amounts of efforts required to produce the evaluation report and not precise levels of expenditures and is based on county estimates.

A brief description of type of cost in each category:

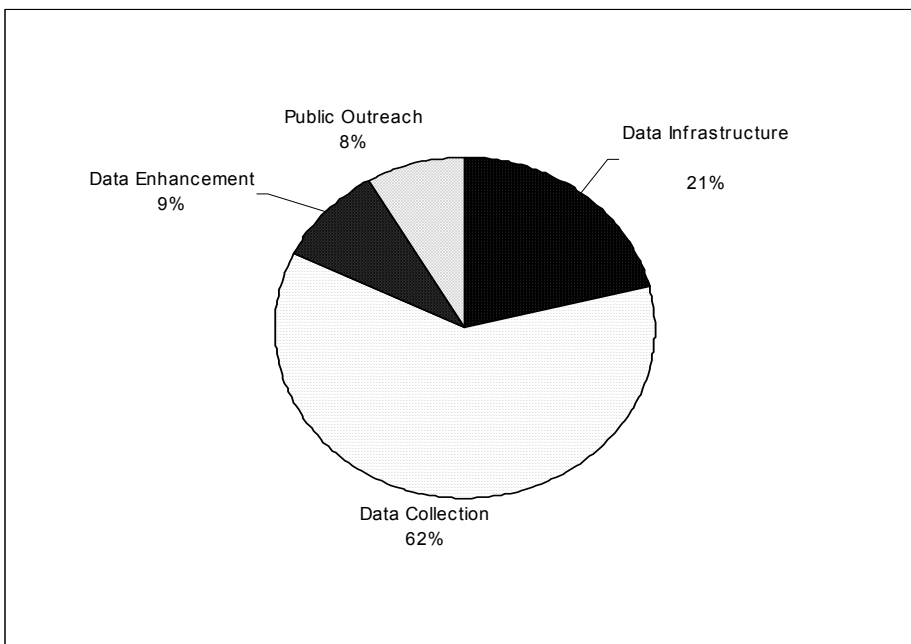
Data Infrastructure: System development to process and analyze the required data, such as GIS development and permit processing software.

Data Collection: The actual collection of development permit data as well as coordination with local jurisdictions.

Data Enhancements: Additional data development to improve estimates of critical areas and other assumptions in the estimation of buildable land.

Public Outreach: Initial public outreach efforts with stakeholders and the compilation and review of the draft of the final evaluation reports.

Figure 7. Estimated Expenditure of Funds for Buildable Lands Program (1997-2002)



Next Steps

Reasonable Measures

The next step in the program is to develop “reasonable measures” to correct inconsistencies between the comprehensive plan’s policies and the actual development outcomes for the communities that do not have adequate land supply.

The buildable lands legislation requires counties and cities to “identify reasonable measures, other than adjusting the urban growth areas, that will be taken to comply with the requirements of this chapter.”

If the buildable lands evaluation finds that there is an inconsistency between what has occurred and the goals of the policies and development regulations, then local governments are required to adopt reasonable measures to increase consistency.

Examples of such measures are:

- Changes to existing zoning.
- Development incentives, such as a density bonus.
- Minimum density requirements.
- Infrastructure investments.

Many of these measures will require amendments to the county-wide planning policies, comprehensive plan, and/or development regulations, including the necessary public involvement.

Many local governments have adopted these types of measures already, and they have been effective in helping them to provide for greater residential densities and employment-based development in UGAs. However, if the buildable lands evaluation finds that reasonable measures are necessary, they would need to be adopted in addition to previously adopted measures.

All six counties indicated in their reports that they would be proceeding with this next step as part of the UGA update process. No indications of timelines were discussed for the implementation of these measures. Since the level of activity will depend on how many jurisdictions will need to carry out this task, no cost estimate has been made at this time.

Challenges Past and Future

The main challenge for all jurisdictions is funding to carry on with the program. The elimination of state funding has resulted in major disruption in most programs, with some experiencing staff cuts and termination of consultant contracts.

Data collection is the mostly costly component of the program. Limited funding will adversely affect data collection efforts for the next update and annual monitoring

programs. Also, coordination of large numbers of jurisdictions in King and Pierce counties is a major task.

Technically, the most difficult part of the buildable lands evaluations was in commercial and industrial land use inventory and analysis. Current employment data were difficult to inventory due to change of uses and availability of data. Forecasting demand for small geographic areas cannot be expected to return reliable results.

Next Evaluation Report

The buildable lands legislation requires the counties to produce an evaluation report every five years. CTED is also required to submit a report to the Legislature in 2007 on the effectiveness of the program.

Appendix A: Buildable Lands Lead Agency Contacts

Jose Alvarez	Clark County	Long-Range Planning	PO Box 9810	Vancouver, WA 98666-9810	(360) 397-2375 x 4318
Chandler Felt	King County	Budget Office	516 Third Ave. Rm. 420	Seattle, WA 98104	(206) 205-0712
Cynthia Moffitt	King County	Department of Development and Environmental Services	900 Oakesdale Ave. SW	Renton, WA 98055	(206) 296-7095
Darryl Piercy	Kitsap County	Department of Community Development, Planning	614 Division St.	Port Orchard, WA 98366-4682	(360) 337-7025
Chip Vincent	Pierce County	Department of Planning and Land Services	2401 S 35 th St.	Tacoma, WA 98409- 7490	(253) 798-2722
Dan Cardwell	Pierce County	Department of Planning and Land Services	2401 S 35 th St.	Tacoma, WA 98409- 7460	(253) 798-7039
Stephen Toy	Snohomish County	Department of Planning and Development Services	3000 Rockefeller Ave. MS 604	Everett, WA 98201- 4046	(425) 388-3311 x 2361
Holly Gilbert	Thurston Regional Planning Council	Planning Program	2404 Heritage Ct. SW #B	Olympia, WA 98502	(360) 786-5480
Sam Wentz	Washington Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development	Growth Management Services	PO Box 48350	Olympia, WA 98504-8350	(360) 725-3063
Ike Nwankwo	Washington Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development	Growth Management Services	PO Box 48350	Olympia, WA 98504-8350	(360) 725-3056

Appendix B: Links to County Buildable Lands Reports

County	Internet Links to Individual County Reports
Clark	http://www.co.clark.wa.us/ComDev/LongRange/CompReview/buildableLands.asp
King	http://www.metrokc.gov/budget/buildland/bldlnd02.htm
Kitsap	http://www.kitsapgov.com/dcd/bla.htm
Pierce	http://www.co.pierce.wa.us/xml/services/home/property/pals/pdf/blreport.pdf
Snohomish	http://www.co.snohomish.wa.us/pds/1000-SCT/Index.asp
Thurston	http://www.trpc.org/programs/estimates+and+forecasts/development/buildable+lands+report.htm